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A FORGOTTEN CHAMPION OF THE CLASSICS

The tides of learning ebb and flow. The scholarship of the first thirty years of the nineteenth century produced critical editions of the Classics which still, nearly a hundred years later, are a delight to possess and a joy to study. In 1835 there were more people in England and in this country who were on good terms with Horace and Vergil than there ever had been before. The more you study the evidence of libraries and old book stores, the more surely is this demonstrated.

Yet as early as 1840 a movement had begun to abolish the teaching of the Classics. It was claimed "that the study of the Greek and Latin languages was becoming daily less necessary, and, in a short period, would fall into universal desuetude". The reasons advanced for this were

that all the best compositions in those languages had been translated; that in consequence of the improvements in scientific knowledge, the student would be obliged to devote the time, hitherto applied to the study of the dead languages, to the theory and practice of Natural Philosophy; that classical tuition was a mental treadmill, the grave of genius, and the classical tutor a squirrel in a rolling cage, or a mill-horse in a pound.

To these counts in the indictment reply is made in The Utility of the Greek and Latin Classics, anonymously printed in London in 1841, a copy of which is to be found in The Library of Congress. The Catalogue experts of that great library have never found out the author's name, but he well could have said Exegi monumentum aere perennius. To-day, when seventy-four years have passed, the good old pedagogue's logic is as fresh as when he wrote his argument. Says he

If the arts and sciences are daily expanding, and their nomenclatures in the same ratio, the languages to which the latter belong must become proportionally more necessary. Unquestionably such nomenclature may be learned in a technological dictionary; but such a compilation, growing ever more bulky, can never be so portable a vade mecum in the pocket as the quantum of Latin and Greek in the head. . . . The medical student finds that the two words by which his very profession is denoted, together with all the terms, major and minor, in anatomy, surgery, pharmacy, materia medica, physiology, botany, chemistry, electricity and galvanism, are either downright Greek or Latin, or immediate derivatives.

He goes on to apply the same reasoning to the other professions and sciences.

A portion of the tyro's time cannot be better employed than in gaining a knowledge of these universal dialects, which will, almost instantly, enable him, in adult age, to master the vocabulary and peculiar literature of the profession that he may embrace.

Then, discussing the similarity of Latin, French, Spanish and Italian, he arranges, one above the other, long quotations from these languages, first the French of Gil Blas with the corresponding Latin words, then a page of Spanish and another of Italian with the Latin superposed.

He continues:

A fair inspection of similar parallels will convince any unprejudiced mind that the Latin is the master-key to the garden of European learning; the key, not the garden itself; the scaffold, not the building; for we must ever remember that mere knowledge of sounds is not the knowledge of things.

He then goes into great detail to show the interweaving of Latin into English, through the centuries, from the time of the Roman occupation, and the influx via the Normans. He says:

The French themselves, on recovering from the vandal enthusiasm which proscribed all antiquity as a dead letter, have partially returned to the ancient system of education, and now require their naval and military cadets to be able to construe and explain Caesar's Commentaries when examined for a certificate.

Again he says:

In pleading for the daily utility of the dead languages no one would recommend so preposterous a measure as that every student should endeavor to become a first-rate Latin and Greek scholar. There are, perhaps, not more than three or four such prodigies in the world to-day—who have a critical knowledge of the languages; who can correctly and elegantly compose in them, in prose or verse, on any moral subject, without note or book of reference. . . .

The unnamed champion of Latin and Greek then fairly outdoes himself in his description of the value of the mythological and classical allusions in modern literature as furnishing a world of mental pictures and visualized comparisons, impossible without this means of "awakening reminiscences which like old friends are always welcome".

We continually meet with cornucopia, *caduceus*, Pandora's box, the aegis of the constitution, the galaxy of beauty, the palladium of freedom, the apple of discord, the cup and the lip, the arrow of Cupid, the thread of life, the fiat of fate, the cap of liberty, the Gordian knot, the arena of disputation, the scales of Justice, the

focus of corruption, the clue of the labyrinth, and an infinity of other figurative phrases. Without multiplying further verbal examples, I would observe that *it is not sufficient to know the bare meaning of the preceding expressions*. The well-regulated mind is not satisfied with learning what particular shape or quantum of brick or mortar may compose a metope or a Caryatid figure; it must have some acquaintance with the etymology and history of such words as well. On our very mantel-pieces, cornices, architraves, pediments and capitals; nay, on our fenders and grates, we see some Hellenic border, honeysuckle, lotus, or acanthus, to remind us of our debt of taste to polished Greece. . . . The obligation, which the moderns are under to the Greeks, for enabling them to form a correct taste in heroic and lyric poetry, painting, sculpture, and architecture; in geometry, grammar, logic and history; in tragedy and comedy, may be appreciated but cannot be repaid. . . . Let us then requite the debt we owe our tutors at least with gratitude. . . . Where would have been the glories of the Vatican and the Louvre; where the sculpture of Michel Angelo and Canova, had not Phidias and Praxiteles hewed the breathing statue from the Parian block? Where the sublimity of Milton, the verve of Dryden, the harmony of Pope, the dithyrambic grandeur of Gray, the sweet dignity of Thomson, had not Homer, Pindar, Theocritus, and Anacreon, with a host of Latin imitators, taught them how to string and tune their harps? . . . Surely it is better that the student should acquire in early life, in the usual and regular course of classical instruction, knowledge thus indispensible to a liberal education: Qui apprend jeune, apprend quinze fois. Let him, then, in the morning outset take such a lasting draught at the fountain-head, as will spare him the trouble of recurring to the stream in the noon and eve of his career.

And so, page after page, this good old preceptor goes on, and pictures the strength of memory, the expansion of reason, the broadening of expression that come from the study of that bright past which, to eyes that can see, ever illuminates the modern sky. He calls to mind that

phalanx of luminaries in the church, on the bench, in the senate, and at the bar—divines, legislators, statesmen, poets, philosophers, and heroes—educated under the old system, to whose worth England owes much of her proud pre-eminence. Let the contemplation of them render us careful how we support those scholastic agitators, who, in sweeping away the cob-webs from our academic institutions, may turn the broom of reform into the besom of destruction.

And he concludes

that the study of the classics is of daily utility as the best exercise of the faculties, as a verbal help, as a means of improving the taste; and also that without a certain acquaintance with them we cannot perfectly understand our own language.

I have selected these few extracts to show how completely, more than seventy years ago, this now forgotten English school-teacher answered, for all time, every objection that can be raised against the Classics, and stated the reasons which must urge the teaching of the Classics to boys and girls so long as there is any nobility of the mind and any inspiration of the imagination.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, D. C. FRED IRLAND.

LATIN AND FOOTBALL[1]

Possibly what we have to say might, with equal propriety, be called The Classics and Athletics, but, since we have preferred to speak chiefly of Latin and football, and only incidentally of Greek and the other athletic exercises, we have adopted this caption, which may seem somewhat humorous and yet may, after all, possess a vein of seriousness productive of profit to teachers and exponents of classical education.

In these days every possible method should be utilized for interesting our students in School and College work in the Classics. With a view to making a suggestion along this line, I ask, Have you, as Latin instructors, ever considered how you can catch and hold the interest of practically all schoolboys by comparing Latin with football, especially in the fall of the year?

Three or four years ago, on the morning I intended to conduct an examination on the Oration for Archias, I was greatly surprised when one of the boys brought me a lineup consisting of players from the class versus the Latin authors and statesmen. Altogether it was a most ingenious affair, and likewise suggestive, and ever since that time, especially with the recurrence of the football season, the possibility of using this suggestion has taken more definite shape in my mind, until this past season I employed some of the terms in my teaching, and the suggestion was immediately appropriated by nearly all the members of the class.

Some years ago we used to hear, in our study of psychology, a great deal about apperception, especially as applied to pedagogical principles. This principle taught us to associate the thing to be learned with something already mastered and thus to build up the new on the old, and, to some extent, out of the old. This principle, coupled with the law of association, is the basis of all the numerous devices for improving our memories.

Do you think, then, that it has generally occurred to the schoolboy that reading Latin and playing football are very similar occupations? Both cost him the sweat of his brow, the ingenuity of his mind and the anguish of his soul, and well they do, for they develop within him the qualities necessary for a strong mind and a stalwart character. As Euclid, the geometrician, told King Ptolemy, 'There is no royal road to geometry', so there is no royal road to football or Latin or any other real achievement, whether it be great or small. The boy takes great pleasure in his football, though he scarcely realizes that it is all work and no play. But since, mirabile dictu, the schoolboy does not always receive as great delight from his Latin as from his football, may we not point out to him how much the one resembles the other?

Sitting down to get his lesson is like the kick-off of the game, since he must focus all his thought upon the

[1]This paper was read at the Ninth Annual Meeting of The Classical Association of the Atlantic States at Swarthmore College, May 7, 1915.